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Introduction

An anonymous online survey about child care was administered to Walla Walla Valley parents and guardians between October 15 and November 9, 2020. The survey was sponsored by the Walla Walla Valley Early Learning Coalition, and administered in partnership with the Whitman College Department of Sociology. The survey was part of a larger data project -- Walla Walla Cares for Kids -- in which plans to gather in-person input from local parents about their work, family, and child care experiences had to be replaced with an online survey, due in large part to the COVID-19 pandemic preventing gatherings and in-person meetings. The Walla Walla Cares for Kids Data Project took place in 2020, a year where the Valley focused unprecedented attention to child care challenges as they impacted local families, schools, care providers, health systems, and workplaces.

The Survey

The survey was distributed using the Qualtrics survey software program. The Walla Walla Valley Early Learning Coalition mailing lists and social media accounts, as well as personal social media accounts of the ELC program director and the survey administrator, were used to share the survey link. Several reminders were sent out during the time the survey was open. An option to enter an email address to be eligible for a raffle for a \$50 gift card was included (the winner was chosen randomly and received the gift card a few days after the survey closed).

Only parents and guardians with children 12 and younger were asked to fill out the survey. Only surveys where the respondent answered that they have at least one child 12 years old or younger, and noted that child's age, were included in analyses.

Respondents were asked to answer questions about child care arrangements for each child separately. Because of this, some analyses include only the sample of parents (n=229). For analyses about children's child care arrangements by age, including parents'/guardians' attitudes about those arrangements, the sample size (n) is 360 children. Individual questions have varied sample sizes, because some respondents left questions blank and some questions did not apply to everyone. Varied sample sizes that correspond to individual questions are noted throughout this report. Sample sizes are noted as (n = xxx).

All analyses were completed using the Qualtrics reporting feature (including filtering and cross-tabulations), as well as Microsoft Excel (primarily using pivot tables).

Who Took the Survey?

229 parents/guardians took the survey (227 in English, 2 in Spanish). Parents/guardians noted the following numbers of children in their care:

79 have one child

107 have two children

32 have three children

9 have four children

2 have five children

Parents/guardians answered questions about their **360 children**, who fit into these age categories:

16 infant (birth-11 months)¹

58 toddler (1-2 years)

83 preschooler (3-5 years)

203 school age (kindergarten-12 years)

Of these 360 children, 23 were explicitly identified as having one or more **disabilities** (respondents listed autism, speech or language issues, sensory issues, developmental delays, mental health issues, Down's Syndrome, ADHD, heart defects, immune system issues, and dyslexia, among other issues). Of these 23 children, one was a toddler, seven were preschoolers, and fifteen were school age.

155 noted **where they live**: most (n=104) live in the city of Walla Walla, with 15 in College Place, 17 in Dayton, 2 in Waitsburg, and the rest (n=17) in Burbank, Dixie, and elsewhere in Walla Walla County combined.

Of the 155 who responded to a question asking about **gender**, 141 are female and 14 male.

The median household **income** in Walla Walla County (in 2018 dollars) is \$56,533 (https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/wallawallacountywashington). The annual household income distribution for survey respondents (n=150) was as follows:

Under \$10,000: 1% \$10,000-24,999: 4% \$25,000-49,999: 18% \$50,000-74,999: 23% \$75,000-99,999: 18% \$100,000-149,999: 29% \$150,000 and greater: 7%

¹ There are fewer groups meeting in 2020 for parents with infants; likely the distribution of the survey among this population was therefore lessened.

Survey respondents are similar to Walla Walla County residents in terms of **race and Hispanic origin** (https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/wallawallacountywashington), except Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin individuals are underrepresented (22% in county v. 12% in the survey), and those selecting two or more race/ethnicity options are overrepresented (3% in county v. 7% in the survey). 148 survey respondents identified themselves in terms of race/ethnicity as follows (numbers add up to more than 100% because people could select all that apply):

89% White2% Asian or Asian-American1% Black or African American1% Native American, American Indian, or Alaska Native

12% Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin

This sample of primarily working parents is disproportionately more likely to be in the labor force than the County rate for all people age 16+ years (58% 2014-2018) (https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/wallawallacountywashington). Of the 159 parents/guardians who answered whether they were **employed** between January and March 2020:

13% said no 20% said yes, fewer than 30 hours per week 67% said yes, at least 30 hours per week

Importantly, the findings of this survey are based on cross-sectional data, which is data collected at one moment in time; it is not longitudinal. The responses are about current experiences and past experiences that the respondent is basing on memory, which is a limitation. The questions were asked in clusters by time period rather than by specific question, in the hopes that this would yield more accuracy and less topic-specific "then-versus-now" comparison.

What did Parents/Guardians Say About their Child Care Arrangements?



Child Care Challenges and Paid Employment*

The 137 people who were employed in January-March 2020 were asked how much child care challenges impacted their paid work between January and March 2020, and since March 2020. **Every child care-related work challenge increased since March 2020**, most dramatically in terms of changing work hours, as shown in the following table:

January- March 2020 "This very much describes me"	January- March 2020 "This somewhat describes me"	January- March 2020 COMBINED "This very much <u>or</u> somewhat describes me"		Since March 2020 "This very much describes me"	Since March 2020 "This somewhat describes me"	Since March 2020 COMBINED "This very much <u>or</u> somewhat describes me"	Change from early 2020 to fall 2020
27%	27%	54%	I had to change my work hours (e.g., adjust start/end time, flexible schedule) because of child care challenges	58%	18%	76%	+22%
8%	2%	10%	I had to change jobs because of child care challenges	5%	7%	12%	+2%
18%	20%	38%	I had to reduce my work hours because of child care challenges	32%	26%	58%	+20%
5%	4%	9%	I had to turn down a promotion because of child care challenges	6%	5%	11%	+2%
5%	2%	7%	I had to quit or was fired because of child care challenges	7%	5%	12%	+2%
12%	27%	39%	I was late or missed work because of child care challenges	27%	29%	56%	+17%

^{*}The other answer choices were "This does not describe me at all" and "This does not apply to me."



Change in Child Care Arrangements Due to COVID-19

The survey began with the following question: In general, how similar or different are your past (January-March 2020) and current (Fall 2020) child care arrangements? (child care is defined as anyone taking care of a child, including parents, friends, family members, neighbors, child care center staff, early learning teachers, and/or other caregivers). Among the 227 parents/guardians who answered this question:

29% said the arrangements are very similar 13% said they are somewhat similar 15% said they are somewhat different 43% said they are very different

For respondents who said that their child care arrangements were somewhat or very different, they were asked this question: Compared to other factors, **how much has COVID-19 affected the change in your child care arrangements?** For these 131 respondents:

82% said "a lot" 14% said "a moderate amount" 3% said "a little" Less than 1% said "none"



Past and Present Child Care Arrangements

The 229 parents/guardians who took the survey answered questions about 360 children. The sample sizes noted in this section refer to children, about whom parents/guardians reported. Survey respondents were looped back to the same questions for each child. There are different sample sizes for different questions.

Who took/is taking care of children?

Fewer children are being taken care of by someone other than a parent now compared to earlier this year, as detailed in this table:

Between January and March			Currently (in Fall 2020)	
My child was taken care of by someone besides a parent for at least 10 hours per week	60%	45%	My child is being taken care of by	
	(209 of 351	(152 of 335	someone besides a parent for at least	
	children)	children)	10 hours per week	

Of those who said that someone besides them or another parent took/is taking care of a child for at least 10 hours per week, the child care arrangements when comparing January-March 2020 and Fall 2020 are as follows, detailed in the table below:

- Family member/friend/neighbor care and nanny/babysitter care increased slightly.
- Sending children to a child care center decreased slightly.
- Sending children to a preschool or school decreased sharply.

Between January and Mac			currently (in Fall 2020) is describes the arrangement"
My child was with a family member, friend, or neighbor	55% of 176 children	65% of 136 children	My child is with a family member, friend, or neighbor
My child was with a nanny or babysitter	30% of 160 children	26% of 118 children	My child is with a nanny or babysitter
My child was at an unlicensed child care center or home	12% of 160 children	5% of 118 children	My child is at an unlicensed child care center or home
My child was at a licensed child care center or home	45% of 168 children	38% of 128 children	My child is at a licensed child care center or home
My child was at a child care center or home but I don't know if it is licensed	2% of 149 children	2% of 115 children	My child is at a child care center or home but I don't know if it is licensed
My child attended K-8 school in person	45% of 163 children	15% of 118 children	My child attends K-8 school in person
My child attended partial day preschool	24% of 156 children	9% of 115 children	My child attends a partial day preschool

87% of the sample of parents are employed, so comparisons between employed and notemployed parents would not be helpful since the two groups are such different sizes. In Fall 2020, fewer children overall were cared for by someone besides a parent or guardian. Among this smaller group of children, the biggest decline in needs being met was among children in preschools or schools, followed by family, friend, or neighbor care. For some arrangements, more needs were met in Fall 2020 as compared to January-March 2020, as detailed in the following table:

Between January and March	"met most or all of our needs"	"met some, few, or none of our needs"	"meets some, few, or none of our needs"	"meets most or all of our needs"	Currently (in Fall 2020)
My child was with a family member, friend, or neighbor	58% of 96 children	42%	49%	51% of 89 children	My child is with a family member, friend, or neighbor
My child was with a nanny or babysitter	40% of 48 children	60%	58%	42% of 31 children	My child is with a nanny or babysitter
My child was at an unlicensed child care center or home	53% of 19 children	47%	0%	100% of 6 children	My child is at an unlicensed child care center or home
My child was at a licensed child care center or home	71% of 76 children	29%	24%	76% of 49 children	My child is at a licensed child care center or home
My child was at a child care center or home but I don't know if it is licensed	67% of 3 children	33%	0%	100% of 2 children	My child is at a child care center or home but I don't know if it is licensed
My child attended K-8 school in person	85% of 72 children	15%	60%	40% of 18 children	My child attends K-8 school in person
My child attended partial day preschool	70% of 37 children	30%	50%	50% of 10 children	My child attends a partial day preschool

Most children were, and are, cared for by family members, friends, or neighbors. Parents with children in this category of care, however, do not identify this type of care as meeting most or all of their needs as much as parents with children in other types of care do. In fact, this form of child care is currently meeting fewer needs than were met in January-March 2020. It is important to point out that frequent use does not necessarily mean most preferred.

What changed for after-school programs?

The number of children attending after-school programs dropped significantly for school-aged children (kindergarten – 12 years), as shown in this table:*

	January- March 2020	Current (Fall 2020)
Children who attended/attend a school-age child care program or after school program (e.g., Camp Fire, YMCA, Valle Lindo Homework Club)	37% of 199 children	10% of 193 children

^{*}The majority of school-aged providers were closed at least part of the time during 2020; some remain closed.



Attitudes about Child Care Arrangements

Respondents were asked to mark how much they agreed with statements about both January-March 2020 and Fall 2020 child care arrangements. The unit of analysis in these questions is the child, not the parent. The statements were phrased in a positive way; the more someone agreed with the statement, the more child care arrangement needs were met. The sample sizes noted in this section refer to children, about whom parents/guardians are reporting.

Agreement with statements about positive elements of child care arrangements decreased by a large percentage in respondents' answers about January-March 2020 and Fall 2020, as detailed in the following table:

January-March 2020			Current (Fall 2020)
Attitudes about Child care Arrangements	% Strongly Agree or Agree	% Strongly Agree or Agree	Attitudes about Child care Arrangements
My pre-March 2020 child care arrangement was ideal	80% (n=296)	43% (n=292)	My current child care arrangement is ideal
I was able to find child care spaces for the AGE of my child(ren)	75% (n=220)	49% (n=223)	I have been able to find child care for the AGE of my child(ren)
I was able to find child care spaces for the HOURS/TIME PERIOD that I need	72% (n=226)	41% (n=215)	I have been able to find child care spaces for the HOURS/TIME PERIOD that I need
I was able to find affordable child care	53% (n=228)	27% (n=208)	I have been able to find affordable child care
I generally felt comfortable sending my child(ren) to a child care environment with other children	79% (n=243)	39% (n=251)	I generally feel comfortable sending my child(ren) to a child care environment with other children
I was able to find child care in a CONVENIENT LOCATION	74% (n=224)	46% (n=199)	I have been able to find child care in a CONVENIENT LOCATION

Sometimes showing both agreement and disagreement with statements can tell a more complete story of people's opinions. For each of the same questions about child care arrangements and time period comparisons above, the level of disagreement increased by a large proportion, as detailed in the following table:

January-March 202	0		Current (Fall 2020)
Attitudes about Child care Arrangements	% Strongly Disagree or Disagree	% Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Attitudes about Child care Arrangements
My pre-March 2020 child care arrangement was ideal	10%	42%	My current child care arrangement is ideal
I was able to find child care spaces for the AGE of my child(ren)	17%	39%	I have been able to find child care for the AGE of my child(ren)
I was able to find child care spaces for the HOURS/TIME PERIOD that I need	20%	49%	I have been able to find child care spaces for the HOURS/TIME PERIOD that I need
I was able to find affordable child care	29%	51%	I have been able to find affordable child care
I generally felt comfortable sending my child(ren) to a child care environment with other children	10%	44%	I generally feel comfortable sending my child(ren) to a child care environment with other children
I was able to find child care in a CONVENIENT LOCATION	13%	37%	I have been able to find child care in a CONVENIENT LOCATION

What both of these tables suggest is: When parents/guardians compared child care arrangements in January-March 2020 to Fall 2020, the arrangements were seen as far less likely to be seen as ideal, less able to meet child age and schedule needs, less affordable, less comfortable, and less convenient in terms of location.

Children with special needs

For children with special needs, the results concerning whether child care arrangements met their needs were mixed. On one hand, a greater proportion of the 39 parents/guardians agreed that their children have had their current child care space needs met as compared to in January-March. However, a greater proportion of these parents/guardians also disagreed that their children's needs were met. To put it another way, fewer parents/guardians remained neutral, suggesting a high degree of variation of child care needs being met (or not) for children with special needs.

January-March 2020	0		Current (Fall 2020)		
Attitudes about Child care Arrangements January-March 2020	% Strongly Agree or Agree	% Strongly Agree or Agree	Attitudes about Child care Arrangements Current (Fall 2020)		
I was able to find child care spaces to meet the SPECIAL NEEDS of my child(ren)	33%	46%	I have been able to find child care spaces to meet the SPECIAL NEEDS of my child(ren)		

January-March 20	20		Current (Fall 2020)		
Attitudes about Child care Arrangements January-March 2020	% Strongly Disagree or Disagree	% Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Attitudes about Child care Arrangements Current (Fall 2020)		
I was able to find child care spaces to meet the SPECIAL NEEDS of my child(ren)	23%	54%	I have been able to find child care spaces to meet the SPECIAL NEEDS of my child(ren)		

Two important caveats for this data about children with special needs:

- 1. Most of the respondents who answered the question about having special needs of their children met referred to school-aged children. The impact of schools remaining open or closed for this population should be considered in any interpretation.
- 2. This question asks about "special needs" and does not refer explicitly to "disability." Recall that 23 children were identified as having one or more disability by parents/guardians who took the survey. These questions about children's special needs contain responses from 39 parents.

How does child age matter?

When broken down by child age, attitudes about child care arrangements vary somewhat, both in terms of individual questions and in terms of comparing January-March with Fall 2020. Because only the parents/guardians of 6 infants answered these questions, this age is combined with toddlers (1-2 years). Here the focus is on ideal arrangements, child age, affordability, and comfort with being around other children for infants/toddlers (birth-2 years), preschoolers (3-5 years), and school age children (kindergarten-12 years old). When parents/guardians compared child care arrangements in January-March 2020 to Fall 2020, the arrangements were far less likely to be seen as ideal, accessible for the age of their child(ren), affordable, and comfortable.

	% Strongly Agree or Agree January-March 2020	% Strongly Agree or Agree Current (Fall 2020)
My child care arrangement was/is ideal		
Infants and Toddlers	60% (n=52)	60% (n=57)
Preschoolers	76% (n=74)	52% (n=69)
School age	88% (n=170)	34% (n=166)
I have been able to find child care for the AGE of my child(ren)		
Infants and Toddlers	62% (n=78)	51% (n=84)
Preschoolers	74% (n=104)	48% (n=99)
School age	79% (n=163)	45% (n=163)
My child care arrangement was/is affordable		
Infants and Toddlers	40% (n=43)	34% (n=44)
Preschoolers	34% (n=62)	29% (n=55)
School age	67% (n=123)	23% (n=109)
I generally felt/feel comfortable sending my child(ren) to a child care environment with other children		
Infants and Toddlers	63% (n=41)	37% (n=51)
Preschoolers	79% (n=62)	55% (n=60)
School age	84% (n=140)	33% (n=140)

Do desires and actual child care arrangements match?

Parents/guardians were asked, for each child, how desirable each of the following child care arrangements would be for the child. Within the group of parents who desired certain arrangements, whether their actual arrangements aligned with their desires was noted, both for January-March 2020 and for Fall 2020.

The most desirable child care arrangements for parents with children of any age would be to take care of children themselves, followed by care from a family member, friend, or neighbor, and then licensed child care center or home. Importantly, in this data there are a large number of children in the sample who are school-aged, and whose arrangements may include being at home after school with siblings or other relatives.

When examining this data, it is important to note that parents were asked what would be desirable in general and hypothetically, not necessarily what would be desirable if given limited options or unlimited options, or what would be desirable when considered in relation to other (real or imagined) options. For these reasons, this data should not be used to assess whether there may be a gap between parent desires and availability of certain care arrangements.

	"This would be very desirable"	Actual January-March 2020 arrangement for those who desire this arrangement	Actual current (Fall 2020) arrangement for those who desire this arrangement
My child would be with me or another parent	53% of 278	48% of 148	34% of 148
My child would be with a family member, friend, or neighbor	32% of 263	72% of 65	79% of 48
My child would be with a nanny or babysitter	15% of 232	33% of 63	22% of 46
My child would be at an unlicensed child care center or home	3% of 218	14% of 63	6% of 47
My child would be at a licensed child care center or home	22% of 222	38% of 64	25% of 48



Open-ended Comments

Respondents were invited to comment on anything related to the survey topics. The responses generated the following word cloud, where each word was mentioned at least once; the word size increases with multiple mentions of the word.



The most common themes mentioned in the open-ended comments related to challenges associated with access to infant and toddler care, affordability, and risk. These quotes represent the types of comments made in this section of the survey:

Very limited child care and maybe unsafe for children. Not enough centers for the community.

Made the decision to have mother stay home with child in 2019 due to lack of affordable child care options

We all have to acknowledge that child care was a problem before pandemic. Child care centers are always full with extensive waiting lists.

I have a nanny but I worry about her bringing in the virus. I feel like nothing is safe or really a good option.

There are so few places that take kiddos under 18 months. It seems like the sense in the area is that either a parent stays home or you have family who can watch babies. That's just not reasonable for two-parent working families or single parents.

Finding safe ways to engage my child with others and in activities was our biggest challenge in addition to adding stress to our family child care provider.

We are struggling as both parents are home, trying to work, but have to sit with kids online. Kids miss social interaction and parents are challenged to keep up with work and unable to afford help.

I feel that this survey neglects something important – that I would very much like my children to attend daycare/in-person school, but that the current safety precautions and viral load in Walla Walla prevents this. It's not that we don't want it, it's that it's not safe, particularly if there are at-risk people in the home.

It is so difficult to find child care spots that are affordable. Even though my husband and I both work full time, most child care options that we found were beyond our price range and more than our monthly mortgage. Though we're not happy with my daughter's provider, it is the only thing that we can afford and we feel stuck in it for that reason.

Was a stay at home and 100% loved it just wish my oldest could have attended preschool part time to get social skills!

We have had insufficient child care this fall primarily because we wanted to avoid disease exposure and could (barely) make it work without going to our licensed daycare center.

It was impossible to find child care for a baby under the age of one. Completely impossible. And now that my child is old enough to get a spot, I don't feel comfortable putting him in daycare during the pandemic.

Summary and Conclusion

This report can be used to inform the Walla Walla Cares for Kids Data Project, as it was intended, as well as in local and regional deliberations about needs, resources, and policy. Importantly, 2020 marked a highly unusual year in terms of child care demands, diminished resources for working families, and economic and health hardships – in the Walla Walla Valley and beyond. But the circumstances of this year, while highlighting increased challenges, also highlighted existing needs and challenges relating to child care that pre-existed the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional use of safety nets in society highlights needs that are already being experienced. When demand for a system, a resource, or infrastructure is higher, it highlights where the system, resource, or infrastructure may be experiencing challenges or strains. Drastic social change can shine a light on needs that were already there.

For this reason, it will be useful to consider both the baseline (January-March 2020) data alongside the current COVID-19-induced outcomes.

Contact

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